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# Pooh-Poohing Pluralism: *Ijtihād*ing *Ḥadith* to Build a Theology of Exclusion

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According to Khaled Abou El Fadl, "one of the core related issues that we Muslim intellectuals must confront is: Do the bin Ladens of the Muslim world actually find justification for the ugliness that they perpetuate in any interpretive tradition in Islam? Does this level of intolerance and criminality find support, however flimsy or absurd, in some of the interpretations of the past?"[1] I agree with Abou El Fadl that the answers to both questions are a resolute "Yes." This article is an analysis of verses in the Qur'ān that are interpreted to pit Muslims against non-Muslims in the world, whether in Iraq, England, or even America. The existence of Islamic extremists — however small in number — operating within democratic Muslim countries as well as non-Muslim countries can no longer be ignored, and their religious rhetoric must be acknowledged, understood, and systematically dismantled.

It is our responsibility as intellectuals to understand the logic of Muslim extremists without interpretively dismissing their arguments as the understandings of medieval civilizations, or worse, as invalid theologically in the modern world, both of which are an opportunistic and dangerous fad among many in the academy today. This article is one step toward understanding extremist logic. But before we can adequately (and collectively) address the use of *jihād* in militant exegesis, rhetoric, and culture, it is of fundamental value to understand the theological position of Christians and Jews according to the sources of authority often cited in most mosques across the Muslim and non-Muslim world today, the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

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Christians and Jews are two religious communities included within *ahl al-kitāb*, or the "People of the Book." They are accorded a different status from other non-Muslims within the Qur'ān because their communities had been "witnesses of previous revelations" brought by former prophets of God.[2] Their position in the afterlife, according to the Islamic source texts, seems contradictory when reading verses in the Qur'ān and the narrations attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad recorded in the *ṣaḥīḥayn*, the two most authoritative collections of the *ḥādīth*. On the one hand, there are some *ḥādīth*s and *āyah*s that indicate that they are condemned to the Hellfire, while other excerpts seem to indicate otherwise.

One verse in the Qur'ān seems antithetical to the *hādīth*s regarding the fate of Christians and Jews who do not accept Islam and the Prophet Muḥammad as God's final prophet and messenger. In *sūrat al-Baqarah* (the bulk of which was revealed between 2 and 3 AH[3]), *āyah* 62, we read a verse that bodes well for the Christians and Jews:

> Verily, those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians and Sabians — whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds — will have their reward before their Lord; on them will be no fear, nor will they grieve.[4]

However, a narration in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* provides a different outlook:

> It is narrated on the authority of Abū Hurayrah [who first met the Prophet in the town of Khaybar in the month of al-Muḥarram in 7 AH[5]] that the Messenger of God, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, said: 'By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad, anyone among the community of Jews or Christians who hears about me and does not believe in that with which I have been sent and dies (in this state), will be among the denizens of the Hellfire.'[6]

Are the above excerpts contradictory? How do classical *muḥaddithūn* (scholars of *hādīth*) and *mufassirirs* (interpreters of the Qur'ān) from one tradition analyze the above extra-scriptural texts? Is there any other specific mention of the Jews' and Christians' destinies in the Qur'ān or *ḥādīth*? What is the final fate of the Christians and Jews on Judgment Day? I will attempt to answer these questions in this article.

In the first part, I examine the content of the *ḥādīth* on this topic. Through analyzing classical commentators' insights on the *ḥadīth* cited above, I determine that the *muhaddith*s confirm the literal meaning of this *ḥadīth*. Citing another *ḥadīth* that specifically discusses the events leading to the condemnation of all Christians and Jews, variations of which are mentioned in both *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* and *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, I resolve that the *ḥadīth* literature leaves no doubt that the Christians and Jews are destined to Hell if


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they have heard of Muḥammad and die as disbelievers in him and Islam. In the second part of my article, I analyze how classical *mufassir*s within the dominant Islamic tradition understands the *āyah* cited above *vis-à-vis* the two *ḥadīth*s that damn *ahl al-kitāb* to the Hellfire. I close the argument with evidence from the Qur'ān not mentioned by these *muhaddith*s and *mufassir*s, which confirms the literal interpretation of the *ḥadīth* mentioned above.

Finally, I discuss the value of these interpretations as they pertain to extremist logic and the rhetoric found within mosques across the non-Muslim world today. I conclude that although an overwhelming amount of evidence exists in support of the sealed fate of the Christians and Jews who die knowing of Muḥammad, more research within differing genres of *tafsīr* (exegesis) spanning the history of Islamic civilizations may widen the interpretation of those who are saved on the Day of Reckoning.

## Analysis of the *ḥadīth* "By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad"

In his famous commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Nawawī (d. 1277 CE) groups the above-mentioned "By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad" *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah with two others in *Kitāb al-īmān* under the *bāb* titled "The Obligation of Believing in the Message of Our Prophet Muḥammad, upon All Peoples and the Abrogation of the Religions by His Religion."[7] The first *ḥadīth* Nawawī cites in this *bāb* is also related by Abū Hurayrah, in which Muḥammad is reported to have said:

> There has not been a prophet before me except that he has been given signs that cause people to believe in him. But that with which I was sent is only the revelation that God has revealed to me, and I hope that I will be (the Messenger) with the largest following on the Day of Judgement.[8]

The above mentioned "By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad" *ḥadīth* is the second *ḥadīth* in this *bāb*, and the third *ḥadīth* that Nawawī lists is narrated on the authority of Abū Mūsā from his father in which the Prophet is reported to have said:

> Three are given the reward twice: a man from *ahl al-kitāb* who believed in his prophet and then reached the Prophet (Muḥammad), believed in him, followed him, and trusted in him has two rewards; a slave who gave God His due and gave his master his due, has two rewards; and a man who had a slave girl, fed her well, raised her well, manumitted her, and then married her, has two rewards.[9]

Nawawī comments on all three *ḥādīth*s sequentially. Related here are the parts of his commentary that are relevant to our discussion.

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Regarding the first *ḥadīth*, Nawawī summarizes that each messenger before Muḥammad had been given miracles and that Muḥammad's clear and great miracle was the Qurʾān, the likeness of which nobody else has been given. Although miracles of other prophets last only as long as that prophet is alive, Muḥammad's miracle, the Qurʾān, will remain with humankind until the Day of Judgement.[10] Nawawī's comments on the third *ḥadīth*, with particular attention to the section regarding *ahl al-kitāb*, are a confirmation of its literal meaning. The double reward awarded to someone's scale among *ahl al-kitāb* is not minimized nor is it abrogated if he delays in joining Islam after the Message reaches him. He receives one reward for following his Messenger and acquires another for following Muḥammad.[11]

With regard to the *ḥadīth* "By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad", Nawawī straightforwardly states that this statement is proof that all other religions are abrogated with the coming of Islam and its Prophet. He continues his short exposition hypothesizing that the Prophet said this intentionally to excuse people to whom the message of Islam did not reach, thereby suggesting that this narration served as a clarification of an already known fact namely that "anyone among the community of Jews or Christians who hears about [Muḥammad] and does not believe in that with which [he has] been sent and dies (in this state), will be among the denizens of the Hellfire." The infinitive of the Arabic verb that Muḥammad uses here is *samʿa* or "to hear," and Nawawī explains that "hearing about [Muḥammad]" means that all people who are present with Muḥammad in his time and exist after his time (until the Day of Judgement) are obligated to follow him if they have ever "heard about him." Nawawī interprets that Muḥammad singled out Jews and Christians in this *ḥadīth* because, though these communities each possess a revealed book, the Qurʾān now supersedes them.[12]

Nawawī wrote much more about this *ḥadīth* than a later commentator, Muḥammad al-Ṭībī (d. 1343 CE). Al-Ṭībī's interpretation focuses on the fact that Muḥammad purposefully did not say "The Jews and the Christians who hear about me and do not believe," but rather said, "Anyone among the community of Jews or Christians who hears about me and does not believe." Al-Ṭībī stresses that the subject is the singular "anyone," because Muḥammad was pinning the individual responsibility of accepting his message on every member of the Jewish and Christian communities.[13] With this short interpretation provided by al-Ṭībī and the few pages in Nawawī's *bāb* on the necessity of believing in the message of the Prophet Muḥammad, these commentators squarely place *ahl al-kitāb* who know about Muḥammad and yet do not believe in him and that which has been revealed to him, in the Hellfire. Searching through al-ʿUthmānī's *Takmilat Fatḥ al-Mulhim* for morsels of wisdom about this *ḥadīth* yielded nothing.[14]


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The *ḥadīth* "By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad" found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is the only *ḥadīth* of its kind in the *ṣaḥīḥayn*. The *ḥadīth* directly focuses on the fate of Christians and Jews and is to be understood literally according to Nawawī and al-Ṭībī. There exists, however, another *ḥadīth*, different variations of which are mentioned in different chapters in the *ṣāḥīḥayn*, that mentions the fate of *ahl al-kitāb* in the context of a larger story about the Day of Judgement. I examine this *ḥadīth* in the following section.

## Analysis of the *ḥadīth* "Let every nation follow that which they used to worship"

The only other *ḥadīth* in the *ṣaḥīhayn* that specifically mentions the destiny of the Jews and Christians in the afterlife is narrated by both Muslim and al-Bukhārī. Muslim narrates this *ḥadīth* as a part of a longer narration in his *Kitāb al-īmān*,[15] and al-Bukhārī narrates it once in his *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān*[16] and once in his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*[17]. All three variations are narrated on the authority of Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, and all three are nearly identical in content with regard to the mention of *ahl al-kitāb*. Below I only quote the passages embedded within these versions that are relevant to our discussion. The first version below is from Muslim's *Kitāb al-īmān*; within brackets I cite the minor differences that appear in al-Bukhārī's version in his *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, since both versions share a similar diction.

> On the Day of Resurrection a caller will announce, 'Let every nation follow that which it used to worship.' Then anyone [replaced in al-Bukhārī with 'he'] who used to worship anything other than God, praise the Lord [this extol is absent in al-Bukhārī], such as idols and other deities, will fall into the Hellfire until none will remain except those who used to worship God alone, from among the obedient people and disobedient people [replaced in Bukhārī with 'both those who were obedient and those who were disobedient'] and the remnants of *ahl al-kitāb*.'
>
> Then the Jews will be called upon and it will be said to them, 'What [replaced in al-Bukhārī with 'Whom'] did you used to worship?' They will say, 'We used to worship *ʿUzayr*, the son of God.' It will be said [al-Bukhārī adds 'to them'], 'You are liars, for God has never taken anyone as a wife or a son. What do you want now?' They will say, 'O our Lord! [The vocative is absent in al-Bukhārī "Our Lord,"] We are thirsty, so give us something to drink.' It is signaled to them [in al-Bukhārī, the 'to them' is absent], 'Do not reply!' Then they will be gathered into the Hellfire, which will look like a mirage whose many sides will be destroying each other. Then they will fall into the Hellfire.
>
> Afterwards the Christians will be called upon, and it will be said to them, 'What [replaced in al-Bukhārī with "Who"] did you used to worship?

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> They will say, "We used to worship *al-Masīḥy*, the son of God." It will be said to them, 'You are liars, for God has never taken anyone as a wife or a son. What do you want now?" [Al-Bukhārī completes the entire section of this *ḥadīth* with 'And in the same manner just like the former.'] They will say, 'O our Lord! We are thirsty, so give us something to drink.' It is signaled to them, 'Do not reply!' Then they will be gathered into Hell (*Jahannam*) which will look like a mirage whose many sides will be destroying each other. Then they will fall into the Hellfire.[18]

Below is the third version excerpted from a much longer *ḥadīth* in al-Bukhārī's *Kitāb al-tawḥīd:*

> Somebody will announce, 'Let every nation follow that which it used to worship.' So the companions of the cross will go with their cross, and the idolaters will go with their idols, and the companions of every god will go with their gods until there remain those who used to worship God alone, both those who were obedient and those who were disobedient and the remaining party of *ahl al-kitāb*. Then Hell [*Jahannam*] will be presented to them as if it were a mirage.
>
> Then it will be said to the Jews, 'What did you used to worship?' They will reply, 'We used to worship 'Uzayr, the son of God.' It will be said to them, 'You are liars because God has neither a wife nor a son. What do you want?' They will reply, 'We want you to provide us with water.' Then it will be said to them, 'Drink,' and they will fall down in Hell [*Jahannam*].
>
> Then it will be said to the Christians, 'What did you used to worship?' They will reply, 'We used to worship *al-Masīḥ*, the son of God.' It will be said, 'You are liars because God has neither a wife nor a son. What do you want?' They will reply, 'We want you to provide us with water.' Then it will be said to them, 'Drink' and they will fall down [in Hell].[19]

Nawawī is silent about *ahl al-kitāb* when commenting on this very long *ḥadīth* narrated in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. Nowhere in his long commentary does he ferret for any corollary interpretations on God's questioning of the Christians and Jews, nor does he summarize the events that lead to their consignment to Hell. This is readily understood because, unlike the previous *ḥadīth* in *Muslim* that fell under the *bāb* titled "The Necessity of Believing in the Message of Our Prophet Muḥammad," this *ḥadīth* is listed under the *bāb* titled, "Confirming That the Believers Will See Their Lord in the Afterlife, Glory Be to Him, the Exalted."[20] Therefore his commentary focuses on the fact that Muslims will see God only in the afterlife and the sequence of events that will occur on the Day of Resurrection. Naturally, Nawawī is more concerned with the Muslims and their condition in the afterlife than with other groups' fates. The same


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characteristic is present in al-Ṭībī and al-ʿUthmānī's commentaries on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and also the commentaries on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*.

Combing through Muslim's *Kitāb al-īmān* in al-ʿUthmānī's *Takmilat fatḥ al-mulhim*[21] and Muḥammad al-Ṭībī's *Sharḥ al-Ṭībī*[22] was unrevealing. Neither commentator even mentions the *ḥadīth* in question. The same exercise was conducted for commentary on the variations of the *ḥadīth* narrated in al-Bukhārī's *Kitāb tafsīr al-Qurʾān* and his *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī's (d. 1449 CE) *Fatḥ al-bārī bi-sharḥ al-Bukhārī*,[23] Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAynī's (d. 1451 CE) *ʿUmdat al-qārī*,[24] and al-Kirmānī's *Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*[25] were empty of any information about the fate of *ahl al-kitāb*. Similar to Nawawī, the Bukhārī commentators focus on issues of primary concern to the Muslims of their generations. The fate of *ahl al-kitāb* was straightforward as far as the commentators were concerned.

Therefore all selections from the *ḥādīths* within the *ṣaḥīḥayn* that encompass the fate of Christians and Jews explicitly condemn them to the Hellfire. Particularly striking, however, is the lack of discourse regarding the question of whether or not *all* Jews and Christians are doomed. This reader, like previous commentators, is left with the literal meaning of the *ḥadīth* to dispel all doubt. First God will destroy all people who do not worship Him alone, and then God will destroy the Jews and Christians regardless of their claims to have worshiped Him alone. The fact that these classical *muhaddiths* provide no further discussion on the fate of *ahl al-kitāb* is an indication that: a) questions of this nature were not as salient then as they are today in a world in which Muslims come into much greater contact with non-Muslims and Muslim countries are economically and militarily subservient to Western powers; and b) that the fate of *ahl al-kitāb* may not yet have become a hotly-debated and polemical issue, for if it had been, we would read the evidence in support of these commentators' positions in their works. It should be noted that there exist other *ḥādīth*s in the *ṣaḥīḥayn* that detail the episodes that unfold on the Day of Judgement in which *ahl al-kitāb* are mentioned, but none that give a more direct account of their fate than the above-cited two *ḥadīth*s.[26]

## Analysis of the *āyah* "Those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians"

Turning now to the Qurʾān and reading *sūrat al-Baqarah*, *āyah* 62, can be confusing if sufficient background is not provided for its understanding. In the final part of this article, I attempt to resolve the seeming contradiction between the previously discussed two *ḥadīth*s and this Qurʾānic verse by a) analyzing the evidence from classical *mufassir*s representing the Sunnī tradition, who provide an historical context for understanding this Qurʾānic *āyah*;

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b) discussing one modern Muslim's exegesis that defends the universalistic position of this Qur'ānic verse; and c) drawing conclusions about the fate of *ahl al-kitāb* based upon my analysis of this *āyah* and the two *ḥadīth*s.

Classical *mufassir*s within the Sunnī Islamic tradition together provide three arguments for limiting the inclusiveness of God's reward beyond the literal meaning of this verse. First I discuss the historical context for the revelation of this verse cited by both al-Ṭabarī[27] (d. 923 CE) and Ibn Kathīr[28] (d. 1373 CE); it specifies a subgroup of the previous believing communities as the reason for its revelation. Next I examine the how al-Qurṭubī[29] (d. 1272 CE) and al-Bayḍāwī[30] (d. 1286 CE) limit the definition of "Those who believe" to mean hypocritical Muslims, and I detail Zadah's[31] (d. 1544 CE) analysis of this verse's grammatical construction that posits it as an indictment by God towards specified groups of non-believing peoples. Finally, I introduce Fazlur Rahman's[32] interpretation of *āyah* 62 and discuss it in relation to the classicists' conclusions that it has been abrogated by a later verse in the Qur'ān, thus rendering *āyah* 62 inapplicable.

Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr discuss the occasion of the revelation of *sūrat al-Baqarah*, *āyah* 62 in their *tafsīr*.[33] Both narrate the story of Salmān al-Fārisī, a pious man who lived an ascetic life by following the gospel of Jesus and was in search of the next and final prophet. When he recognized Muḥammad as the final prophet by the signs that his teacher had told him about, he asked the Prophet Muḥammad about the fate of his people whom he had left behind. Salmān defined his faith and the faith of his previous companions by specifying their religious practices and beliefs: they used to pray, fast, worship God without assigning partners to Him, and were awaiting another prophet in whom they would believe and follow as God's final messenger. Ibn Kathīr then expounds:

> It was on this occasion that God revealed, 'Verily, those who believe and those who are Jews and Christians and Sabians — whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds — will have their reward before their Lord; on them will be no fear, nor will they grieve.' [This *āyah*] clarifies that the believers amongst the Jews were the ones who held fast to the practices of Moses until Jesus came, after which they then followed Jesus. But those [Jews] who continued after Jesus' arrival to hold fast to the *Tawrāh* will perish. The believers amongst the Christians were those who held fast to the *Injīl* and followed what Jesus had been sent with until Prophet Muḥammad's arrival. And whoever does not follow Prophet Muḥammad now and leaves behind that which he used to follow will surely perish.[34]

Ibn Kathīr defines acceptable belief (*al-īmān*) for the Jews and Christians as having followed the practices of their prophets and the commandments in


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their revealed scriptures until the next prophet of God arrived. Therefore, belief is defined for the Jews as following the *Tawrāh* until Jesus arrived with the *Injīl*. Belief is defined for the Christians as following the *Injīl* until Muḥammad arrived with the Qur'ān. According to Ibn Kathīr, now that Muḥammad has come as God's final messenger, those who seek a religion other than Islam — from the time of Muḥammad's coming and forward — will commit themselves to Hellfire because God promises in His final revelation that it will not be accepted from them on the Day of Judgement.

Although al-Ṭabarī relates a slightly different ending to the *Salmān al-Fārisī* story, he draws the same conclusions. After hearing Salmān's question about the fate of his co-religionists, the Prophet answered, "O Salmān, they are the people of Hellfire."[35] This deeply saddened Salmān and so, according to al-Ṭabarī, God sent down this verse concerning his friends in order to allay Salmān's grief. The Prophet is said to have told Salmān:

> Whoever has died in the faith of Jesus and died in Islam before he had heard of me, his fate will be good. But whoever hears of me today and still does not believe in me, he will perish.[36]

Earlier in his commentary, al-Ṭabarī defines what the Prophet meant by "died in Islam" as "testifying to the Resurrection after death which occurs on the Day of Judgement, doing righteous good deeds in obedience to God, . . . and believing in the coming of Muḥammad"[37] Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr limit the application of the *āyah* by assigning the reason of its revelation not to *ahl al-kitāb* in general, but to previous believing communities who had believed in the coming of Muḥammad and were also steadfast in the practice of their faith.

An alternative interpretation of this verse renders it an indictment of all Jews, Christians, and hypocritical Muslims who do not complete their belief by accepting the revelation given to Muḥammad. Al-Qurṭubī mentions in his commentary that the limiting phrase beginning this verse, "Those who believe,"[38] points to the hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) "who believe in appearance only, but have no true faith."[39] Al-Bayḍawī concurs, "'Those who believe' means those from among Muḥammad's community. It has been said that the reference here is to the *munāfiqūn*, since they [i.e., 'Those who believe'] have been associated with the disbelievers [i.e., the Christians, Sabians, and Jews] in this verse."[40] The other three groups of people in this verse are disbelievers, and mention of the believers in the category of disbelievers seems contradictory unless we understand "Those who believe" to mean, "those who profess faith by their tongues only"[41] and are therefore believers in the eyes of the world, but not before God.

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This idea that "Those who believe" are to be understood as Muslim hypocrites coupled with a grammatical exegesis of the subject of the phrase in the next line of the verse, "whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does righteous good deeds,"[42] limits the bounty of God to only those who accept the Qur'ān and Muḥammad. Al-Bayḍawī's commentary is annotated by Zadah, who provides a grammatical gloss for understanding the subject of this phrase to mean subgroups of the larger Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities. Below, Zadah's exegetical annotations on al-Bayḍawī's exegesis are in brackets. I have added further clarification in parentheses where the English translation of the author's parlance does not convey the meaning that is obvious in the original Arabic:

> 'They will have their reward before their Lord,' that is, whoever among them was following his religion before it was abrogated. [He (al-Bayḍawī) adds the words 'among them' in consideration of the possibility that 'whoever believes' is a *mubtada'* (subject) whose *khabar* (predicate) is 'they shall have their reward.' Both this *khabar* along with its *mubtada'* comprise the *khabar* for the Exalted's words, 'Those who believe.' A phrasal *khabar* invariably requires an *'ā'id* (something that connects to its *mubtada'*, for otherwise we would have a hanging phrase, which is inadmissible), but none is explicitly mentioned, and so it (the *'ā'id*) is implicitly understood to be 'among them.'[43]

To summarize then, both al-Bayḍawī and al-Qurṭubī use the term "Those who believe" in the non-literal or figurative sense of the term designating the *munāfiqūn*. The literal meaning of belief is reserved for the phrase beginning with "whoever believes," where "belief" is defined as submitting in one's faith and practice to the completion of revealed religion sent to the Prophet Muḥammad.[44] There is also an implicit *'ā'id* that recasts the subject of the next phrase as "whoever among them believes" in lieu of "whoever believes."

Thus far we have discussed two possibilities for interpreting *āyah* 62 in *sūrat al-Baqarah*. Translations of this verse reflecting the interpretation of the above extracts from Zadah, al-Bayḍawī, and al-Qurṭubī would now read:

> Verily, those who merely profess to believe among the Muslims and those who are Jews and Christians and Sabians — whoever among them now believes in God and the Last Day [the hypocrites must do so by adding affirmation of their hearts to their verbal declaration of faith, the others by embracing what Muḥammad has been sent with] and does righteous good deeds — will have their reward before their Lord. On them will be no fear, nor will they grieve.[45]

Translations of this verse reflecting the interpretation of the above extracts from al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr would now read:


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> Verily, those who believe [as Muslims] and those who are Jews [who held fast to the practices of Moses until Jesus came, after which they then followed Jesus] and Christians [who held fast to the *Injīl* and followed what Jesus had been sent with until Muḥammad's arrival, after which they then followed Muḥammad — pending their hearing of him] and Sabians — [all of] these [people] who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous good deeds — will have their reward before their Lord; On them will be no fear, nor will they grieve.[46]

No matter which interpretation is favored, both indicate a terrible fate for: a) *ahl al-kitāb* during the time of Muḥammad who had heard of Muḥammad and did not affirm faith in him and the Qurʾān; and b) *ahl al-kitāb* today who have heard of Muḥammad and do not affirm faith in him and the Qurʾān. Nevertheless, one modern Muslim scholar thinks otherwise.

Fazlur Rahman, the late professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Chicago, dispenses with the opinions of the classical and traditional *mufassir*s and boldly declares that the vision of the Qurʾān is antithetical to the exclusivity that al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī exhort:

> . . . [T]he vast majority of Muslim commentators exercise themselves fruitlessly to avoid having to admit the obvious meaning: that those — from any section of humankind — who believe in God and the Last Day and do good deeds are saved. They either say that by Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans [*sic*.] here are meant those who have actually become 'Muslims' — which interpretation is clearly belied by the fact that 'Muslims' constitute only the first of the four groups of 'those who believe' — or that they were those good Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans [*sic*.] who lived before the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad — which is an even worse *tour de force*.[47]

Rahman refutes the classicists by arguing that they must take an interpretive leap to conjure up limitations on *āyah* 62. Rahman is obviously not swayed by the grammatical exegesis of Zadah or the historical background that the *Salmān al-Fārisī* story lends to the hermeneutics of the verse. Perhaps recognizing their oblique interpretive theories, the classicists answer Rahman's cross-examination in one unified voice.

Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī all conclude that despite competing interpretations of *āyah* 62 in *sūrat al-Baqarah*, strong evidence points to its abrogation by *āyah* 85 in *sūrat Āl ʿImrān*, which was revealed to Muḥammad in 9 AH.[48] Ibn Kathīr concludes his discussion on the fate of *ahl al-kitāb* in his commentary of *āyah* 62 determinedly, "And afterwards [the verse] 'Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers,' was revealed."[49] Al-Ṭabarī agrees. Near the end of his long exegesis on this *āyah* he remarks, "Ibn ʿAbbās

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narrated, 'God has revealed this verse and afterwards, God revealed [*sūrat Āl ʿImrān, āyah* 85]'"[50] Al-Qurṭubī also cites Ibn ʿAbbās in his commentary, "Ibn ʿAbbās narrated, 'This verse is abrogated,' meaning that [*sūrat al-Baqarah, āyah* 62] is abrogated with the later words of God, 'Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers.'"[51] Regarding the question of the fate of *ahl al-kitāb*, all the *mufassirs* present *āyah* 85 in *sūrat Āl ʿImrān* as the definitive verse on this topic.

This verse is so succinct that perhaps even Rahman would agree with its literal meaning. But Rahman is silent. Never does he cite it in his book nor does he mention the fact that the traditionalists discuss the abrogation of *āyah* 62 by *āyah* 85 in their *tafsīr*s. By doing so, Rahman misrepresents the traditionalist position. He permits his readers to believe that they are at odds with one another about the interpretation of *āyah* 62 when, in fact, they do not rest upon the former admittedly confusing and convoluted arguments, but declare quite conclusively that *sūrat Āl ʿImrān, āyah* 85 abrogates *sūrat al-Baqarah, āyah* 62. Rahman clearly holds a minority opinion on the fate of *ahl al-kitāb*, and he supports his argument by citing Qurʾānic verses that chastise Jewish and Christian communities for claiming "proprietorship over God's guidance."[52] But his projection of this argument towards the Muslim community is easily refuted by the prophetic tradition narrated by Salmān al-Fārisī in al-Ṭabarī's commentary, ". . . [W]hoever hears of me today and still does not believe in me, he will perish."[53]

Rahman, and other scholars who may doubt the authenticity of the Ibn ʿAbbās narration, must take into account further arguments that the Qurʾān itself provides. *Sūrat al-Māʾidah* contains two verses forbidding Paradise to the majority, if not all, of the Christian sects:

> Surely, they have disbelieved [*kafara*] who say, 'God is *al-Masīh* [Jesus], son of Mary.' But *al-Masīh* [Jesus] said, 'O children of Israel! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.' Verily, whoever sets up partners with God, then God has forbidden Paradise to them, and the Hellfire will be their abode. And there will be no helpers for the wrongdoers. Surely, the disbelievers are those who said, 'God is the third of the three [in a Trinity].' But there is no god but the One God. If they do not stop saying these things, then a painful torment will befall those disbelievers from among them.[54]

These two verses clearly indicate that those who either attribute divinity to Jesus or profess the concept of the trinity commit disbelief (*kufr*) and are thus regarded as disbelievers by God. Such individuals are necessarily excluded from the promise of *sūrat al-Baqarah, āyah* 62. Another pair of verses from *sūrat al-Nisāʾ* further limits the promise of *āyah* 62 to only those who accept all of God's messengers:


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> Verily, Those who disbelieve in God and His messengers and [those who] wish to make distinctions between God and His messengers by saying, 'We believe in some [messengers], but reject other [messengers],' and [those who] wish to adopt a middle path — They are the disbelievers in truth. And We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating torment.[55]

These two verses clearly indicate that those who reject any of God's prophets also commit *kufr* and are thus regarded as disbelievers by God. Hence, after accounting for the above two excerpts from the Qurʾān, in light of *āyah* 62 in *sūrat al-Baqarah*, only those Christians and Jews who had followed unaltered forms of Judaism and Christianity and died without having heard about the Prophet Muḥammad, remain victors on the Day of Judgement. Analyzing the Qurʾānic verses in this manner confirms Muḥammad's statement in the *ḥadīth*:

> By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad, anyone among the community of Jews or Christians who hears about me and does not believe in that with which I have been sent and dies (in this state), will be among the denizens of the Hellfire.[56]

The meaning of *āyah* 62 in *sūrat al-Baqarah* is limited in meaning by the above *āyah*s from *sūrat al-Nisāʾ* and *sūrat al-Māʾidah*. By only utilizing Qurʾānic verses, we return full-circle to the *ḥadīth* that sparked this inquiry about the fate of *ahl al-kitāb*.

## Conclusion

Based upon the *tafsīr*s examined in this article, the Qurʾān is quite clear that those who have heard of Muḥammad and do not accept him as God's final messenger and the Qurʾān as God's last revelation will be "losers" in the afterlife. This dovetails with the message of the *ḥadīth* literature. Although the *mufassirs* never mentioned in their *tafsīr*s either of the two *ḥadīth*s examined here, they reach the same conclusions by authorizing Ibn ʿAbbās narration that *āyah* 85 in *sūrat Āl ʿImrān* abrogates *āyah* 62 in *sūrat al-Baqarah*. If one refutes the Ibn ʿAbbās narration, however, evidence from the Qurʾān itself clarifies the issue: *ahl al-kitāb* are consigned to the Hellfire if, after hearing about Muḥammad, they do not accept him and his message. In fact, the Qurʾānic verse, "Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he will be among the losers,"[57] actually widens the scope of the *ḥadīth* "By Him in whose hand is the life of Muḥammad." A place in Hell is reserved not only for *ahl al-kitāb* who hear of Muḥammad and do not follow him, but for all people following any religious practice contrary to the Islamic form of monotheism. Ibn Kathīr provides

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support from the *ḥadīth* for this idea in his exegesis of *sūrat Āl ʿImrān, āyah* 85. First he expands the literal meaning of the Qurʾānic verse to mean, "Whoever chooses a path other than the path ordained by God, it will not be accepted of him."[58] Then he supports his interpretation with a tradition related back to the Prophet Muḥammad, which he claims to be *ṣaḥīḥ*, "Whoever does a [religious] deed that is not from among that which we [Muslims] do, it will be rejected [by God]."[59]

Nevertheless, having only examined the claims of classical *mufassirs* representing the majority tradition within Islam, namely *ahl al-sunnah wa-l-jamāʿah*, it may not be possible to conclude that their interpretations of *āyah* 62 close the chapter on the meaning of this Qurʾānic verse for those outside the Sunnī tradition. Missing within this short disquisition are other exegeses that span the history of Islam's spread and with it, the long and complex history of Qurʾānic interpretation. As the *tafsīr*s began to reflect the training and religious affiliation of their writers, they became more varied. I have not examined, for example, any mystical or philosophical Muʿtazilī, or Shīʿī *tafsīr*s from the classical period. Nor have I examined other "modern" *tafsīr*s not written in English. More Muslims live among non-Muslims than ever before, and given the rise in the level of contact the Muslim world has with the non-Muslim world, readily accessible modern exegeses further clarifying *āyah* 62 in light of contemporary circumstances are clearly wanting.

## Endnotes

1. Abou El Fadl, Khaled, "Khaled Abou El Fadl Replies," *Boston Review*. Vol. 27, No. 1, February/March, 2002. http://bostonreview.net/BR27.1/abouelfadl.html.
2. Vajda, G. "Ahl al-Kitāb," *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979, New ed.), 264.
3. Ibn Kathīr mentions that *sūrat al-Baqarah* was revealed to Muḥammad between the years in which the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uhud were fought. Ibn Kathīr, ʿIsmāʿīl ibn ʿUmar. *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʾadhīm*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1983, Second ed.), 34.
4. Al-Qurʾān 2:62,(my translation).
5. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī, *Al-Isābah fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥābah*, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Nahḍah al-Misr, 1990, First ed.), 435.
6. Al-Nawawī, Muḥī al-Dīn Abū Zakary Yāḥy ibn Sharaf, *Al-Minhāj fī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 2. (Damascus: Dār al-Khay, 1998, Fifth ed.); Kitāb al-īmān: bāb 70, ḥadīth 240, 341.
7. *Ibid*., 340.
8. *Ibid*., Kitāb al-īmān: bāb 70, ḥadīth 239, 340.
9. *Ibid*., Kitāb al-īmān: bāb 70, ḥadīth 241, 341.
10. *Ibid*., 340–2.
11. *Ibid*., 342–3.
12. *Ibid*., 342.


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13. Al-Ṭībī, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Husayn ibn ʿAbd-Allah ībn Muḥammad, *Sharḥ al-Ṭībī ʿalā mishkāt al-maṣābīḥ al-musammā bi-l-kāshif an haqā'iq al-sunan*, Vol. 2. (Al-Riyadh: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1997, First ed.), 446.

14. The edition I used for my research was published in Karachi in 1986. Although the compiler states in the introduction to volume one that it contains the entirety of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, in fact it only contains severely condensed *bābs* — perhaps because this edition was primarily created for Pakistani jurists. Al-ʿUthmānī, Muḥammad Taqī. *Takmilat Fatḥ al-mulhim bi-sharḥ Ṣāḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim ibn al-Hajjāj al-Qushayri*, Vol. 2 (Karachi: Maktabāt Dar al-ʿUlūm, 1986, First ed.), 175–258.

15. *Op. cit*., Kitāb al-ʿīmān: *bāb* 80–1, ḥadīth 302. Vol. 1, 399–405.

16. Muhammad ibn Ismāʿīl, Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 7 (Cairo: Government of Egypt, Ministry of Awqāf, Committee on the Revival of the Sunnah Books, 1998, Fourth ed.); Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān: sūrah 4, bāb 8, 176–8.

17. Al-Kirmānī. *Al-Bukhārī bi sharḥ kirmānī*, Vol. 25 (Cairo: al-Bahiyya Būfāz Publishing, 1937, First ed.); Kitāb al-tawḥīd: bāb 24, ḥadīth 6987, 146–153.

18. The page numbers attached to these bibliographic references indicate the excerpted sections of this ḥadīth. *Op. cit*., Vol. 3.; Kitāb al-ʿīmān: bāb 80–1, ḥadīth 302, 399–400; *Op. cit*., Vol. 7; Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān: sūrah 4, bāb 8, 176–7.

19. The page numbers attached to this bibliographic reference indicate the excerpted sections of this ḥadīth. *Op. cit*., Vol. 25; Kitāb al-tawḥīd: bāb 24, ḥadīth 6987, 146–7. Not cited above are the remaining portions of the three versions of this *ḥadīth*. The major themes of the *ḥadīth* include an affirmation that the Muslims will be able to see God on the Day of Judgement, a *tafsīr* of *sūrat al-Nisā'*, *āyah* 40, and intercession by the Muslims, prophets, angels, and God — none of which are relevant to our discussion – on the fate of the Christians and Jews.

20. *Op. cit*., Vol. 3. Kitāb al-ʿīmān: bāb 80–1, 391.

21. *Ibid*.

22. *Ibid*., Vol. 2. Kitāb al-īmān, 421–656.

23. Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad ibn 'Ali, *Fatḥ al-Bārī bi-sharḥ al-Bukhārī*, Vol. 17 (Cairo: Halabī Publishing House, 1959), Kitāb al-tawḥīd: bāb 24, 193–208. *Op. cit*., Vol. 9. Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān: sūrah 4, bāb 8, 218.

24. Al-ʿAynī, Badr al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn Aḥmad, ʿUmdat al-qārī: sharḥ ṣahīḥ al-Bukhārī, Vol. 12 (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1998, First ed.), 529–532. This edition of ʿAynī's *'Umdat al-qārī* did not extend to al-Bukhārī's last book, Kitāb al-tawḥīd, in which one variation of this ḥadīth was recorded. No editions of *'Umdat al-qārī* that were available to me extended to al-Bukhārī's last book.

25. *Op. cit*., Vol. 17. Kitāb tafsīr al-Qur'ān: sūrah 4, bāb 8, ḥadīth 4267, 77–9; *Op. cit*., Vol. 25. Kitāb al-tawḥīd: bāb 24, ḥadīth 6987, 146–153.

26. For example, there are a group of three *ḥādīth*s in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that discuss the ransoming of a Muslim for a Christian or Jew on the Day of Judgement. Through the context it is clear that the Jews and Christians are in the Hellfire, but it is never stated specifically within any of the three *ḥādīth*s. A brief synopsis of this ransoming is as follows: A Muslim is destined to the Hellfire because of his sins. However, when he arrives in the Hellfire, a Jew or a Christian is standing in his assigned place. Because of this fact, the Muslim is granted Paradise. According to Nawawī's commentary, the Jews and Christians do not bear the sins of the ransomed Muslims. *Op. cit*., Vol. 17. Kitāb al-tawbah: bāb 8, ḥādīths 50, 51, and 52, 237–9.

27. Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr, Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Halabī Publishing House, 1968, Third ed.), 317–24.

28. *Op. cit*. Vol. 1, 93–4.

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29. Abū ʿAbd-Allah Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Anṣārī, Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jamiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1996, Second ed.), 436–9.

30. ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿUmar al-Baydawī's *tafsīr* is fully contained within the margins of Zadah's commentary on al-Baydawī's *tafsīr* in: Muḥammad Muṣliḥ al-Dīn Muṣṭafā al-Qūjawī Muḥī al-Dīn al-Hanafī, *Zadah. Hashīyay Shaykh Zadah ʿalā tafsīr al-Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī*, Vol. 1 (Istanbul: Waqf al-Ikhlās, 1990), 313–5.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Fazlur, Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān.* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 166.

33. I have only included the relevant material on Salmān al-Fārisī's story from al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr*s. For a complete narrative of the Salmān al-Fārisī story, see al-Ṭabarī's account: *Op. cit.*, 321–23.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, 323.

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*, 320–1.

38. Al-Qurʾān 2:62.

39. *Op. cit.*, 436–7.

40. This is one of Bayḍāwī's interpretations of the verse. *Op. cit.*, 313.

41. This is one of Zadah's notes on Bayḍāwī's exegesis. *Op. cit.*, 313–4.

42. Al-Qurʾān 2:62.

43. This citation includes both Zadah's notes and al-Bayḍāwī's exegesis. *Op. cit.*, 314–5.

44. This is one of Zadah's many explanatory notes on al-Bayḍāwī's exegesis. *Ibid.*

45. Al-Qurʾān 2:62, (my translation).

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Op. cit.*

48. This is recorded at the beginning of Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* on sūrat Āl ʿImrān. *Op. cit.*, 296.

49. *Ibid.*, 94.

50. *Ibid.*, 323.

51. *Ibid.*, 439.

52. *Ibid.*, 165.

53. *Ibid.*, 323. Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966 CE), another modern but traditional scholar, reaches the same conclusion as al-Ṭabarī. Before Muḥammad's election as God's final Prophet, God's bounty "was for people who have faith in every time and place. It was for anyone according to the faith by which he lived until the coming of the next revelation." But afterwards, the only faith that God will accept from humankind is Islam. For more details see: Quṭb, Sayyid, *Fī-zhilāl al-Qurʾān*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār Ihyā al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1971, Seventh ed.), 94–6.

54. Al-Qurʾān 5:72–3.

55. *Ibid.*, 4:150–1.

56. *Op. cit.*, Al-Nawawī. Kitāb al-ʿīmān: bāb 70, ḥadīth 240, 341.

57. Al-Qurʾān 3:85.

58. *Op. cit.*, 326.

59. *Ibid.*


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